TROY FUTURES

IMAGE AND PRESENTATION TASK FORCE

TRENDS NARRATIVE

The Image and Presentation Task Force explores the look and feel of the City of Troy. The look and feel of a City is not quantifiable in the true scientific sense, and therefore difficult to show trends. While on the other hand there is a wealth of literature that explores great cities worldwide and suburban America. Edmund N. Bacon was the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Planning Commission for over twenty years and directed an acclaimed program of restoration and rebuilding of Philadelphia through the 1950's and 1960's. Mr. Bacon studied architecture at Cornell University and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, under Eliel Saarinen. In Mr. Bacons book, Design of Cities, he wrote:

> *"The building of cities is one of man's greatest achievements. The form of his city always has been and always will be a pitiless indicator of the state of his civilization. This form is determined by the multiplicity of decisions made by the people who live in it. In certain circumstances these decisions have interacted to produce a force of such clarity and form that a noble city has been borne."*

Cities are made up of urban spaces. Lawrence Halprin, one of America's legendary landscape architects who designed the adaptive reuse of Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco and described urban spaces in his book Cities:

> *"The life of cities is of two kinds – one is public and social, extroverted and interrelated. It is the life of the streets and plazas, the great parks and civic spaces and the dense activity and excitement of the shopping areas. This life is mostly out in the open in the great urban spaces, where crowds gather and people participate in exciting urban interrelationships which they seek as social human beings. It is the life of sidewalk cafes and museums and waterfront activities, of theatre–going and night clubs at night; the public city, bustling, active and exciting."*

> *"There is, too, a second kind of life in the city – private and introverted, the personal, individual, self-oriented life which seeks quiet and seclusion and privacy. This private life has need for open spaces of a different kind….It needs enclosure and quiet, removal from crowds and quality of calm and relaxation. The city should respond to both needs and both kinds of activity for they are equally important parts of the urban environment we are seeking"*

According to Bacon and Halprin great cities are created by orchestrated specific decisions to create public and private vibrancy. But how do we communicate about these urban spaces. What terminology do we use to describe the physical components of a city. Kevin Lynch's, The Image of the City, is the result of a five-year study on how users of cities perceive and organize spatial information as they navigate through cities. Lynch reported that users understood their surroundings in consistent and predictable ways, forming mental maps, imageability, wayfinding and place legibility with five elements:

"Paths. Paths are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads. For many people, these are the predominant elements in the image. People observe the city while moving through it, and along these paths the other environmental elements are arranged and related."

"Edges. Edges area the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes. Such edges may be barriers, more or less penetrable, which close one region of from another; or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together. These edge elements, although probably not as dominant as paths, are for may people important organizing features, particularly in the role of holding together generalized areas, as in the outline of a city by water or wall."

"Districts. Districts are the medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters "inside of", and which are recognizable as having' some common, identifying character. Always identifiable from the inside, they are also used for exterior reference if visible from the outside. Most people structure their city to some extent in this way, with individual differences as to whether paths or districts are the dominant elements. It seems to depend not only upon the individual but also upon the given city."

"Nodes. Nodes are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling. They may be primarily junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another. Or the nodes may be simply concentrations, which gain their importance from being the concentration of some use or physical character, as a street-corner hangout or an enclosed square. Some of these concentration nodes are the focus and epitome of a district, over which their influence radiates and of which they stand as a symbol. They may be called cores. Many nodes, of course, partake of the nature of both junctions and concentrations. The concept of node is related to the concept of path, since junctions are typically the convergence of paths, events on the journey. It is similarly related to the concept of district, since cores

are typically the intensive foci of districts, their polarizing center. In any event, some nodal points are to be found in almost every image, and in certain cases they may be the dominant feature."

"Landmarks. Landmarks are another type of point – reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simple defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain. Their use involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities. Some landmarks are distant ones, typically seen from many angles and distances, over the tops of smaller elements, and used as radial references. They may be watching the city or at such a distance that for all practical purposes they symbolize a constant directions. Such are isolated towers, golden domes, great hills. Even a mobile point, like the sun, whose motion is sufficiently slow and regular, may be employed. Other landmarks are primarily local, being visible only in restricted localities and from certain approaches. These are the innumerable signs, store fronts, trees, doorknobs, and other urban detail, which fill in the image of most observers. They are frequently used clues of identity and even of structure, and seem to be increasingly relied upon as a journey becomes more and more familiar"

Kevin Lynch's five elements to describe and talk about cities will provide Troy Futures participants the terminology to talk about the urban design of Troy. What type of City is Troy? It is far from the classic city with centuries of history, Troy is only 50 years old in 2005. There is no downtown in the traditional sense, although there are concentrations of intensity, for example Big Beaver Road. Joel Garreau's book, Edge City: Life on the New Frontier, describes Troy as an edge city that has matured beyond a bedroom community. Jobs outnumber the homes, about 125,000 people commute to work in Troy. Garreau describes four other requirements to qualify as an edge city:

"It has 5 million-plus square feet of leaseable office space -- the workplace of the Information Age."

" It has 600,000 square feet or more of leaseable retail space to offer "everything you could conceivably need to buy in one place." It's the size of a medium-sized mall with at least three nationally famous department stores, and 80-100 shops and boutiques."

" It is perceived by the population as one place. It is a regional end destination for mixed use that "has it all," from jobs, to shopping, to entertainment. It's built around transportation systems like road interchanges and it's normally located within 10 miles from the original downtown."

"It's brand new. Thirty years ago (now forty years) it was cow pastures or residential suburbs."

The overriding characteristic of edge cities and Troy is that they are developed under modified Euclidian zoning ordinances. These zoning ordinances require strict separation of land uses. In addition the city is designed for the automobile, not the human scale. For example, for most neighborhoods it is very difficult for residents to walk or bike to the local store. It should be noted that Troy's zoning ordinance and city planning was very successful in controlling the exploding growth over the past three decades. In addition it implemented a balance of industrial, office, commercial and residential land uses that are proven to provide a strong tax base. If Troy is to mature into a noble city the existing zoning ordinance and future land use plan must be revised. But what direction should be considered?

In response to the post World War II suburban development throughout the USA an organization was created, the Congress for New Urbanism. In 1996 the Congress created the <u>Charter of the New Urbanism</u>:

> *"The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge."*

> *"We stand for the restoration of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy."*

> *"We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework."*

> *"We advocate the restructuring of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice."*

> *"We represent a broad-based citizenry, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to reestablishing the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design."*

> *"We dedicate ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment."*

By no means is the Congress for New Urbanism perfect, with the perfect answer for Troy or America. But, can some of the concepts from the Charter help improve Troy. Should Troy be retrofitted over time to address the human scale with less emphasis on the automobile scale. Try to walk along any major thoroughfare from business to business or from one neighborhood to another. It is difficult. Should there be more consideration of high quality of design for both public and private development? When a person enters a gateway into Troy, should there be an identifiable image? Should private and public development create an identifiable image? We must recognize that cities continue to redevelop and evolve and encourage the development of a noble city.